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Of all major U.S. relationships, the one most vexed and most devoid of cooperation where cooperation is most in both side's national interest is with Russia. Must this be so? Might there be an alternative path forward and is this the moment to probe the possibility? The first stuttering hope has begun to take shape. Beginning with Vice-President Biden's much cited "time to press the reset button" remark at the Munich conference on February 7 and continuing with Undersecretary of State William Burns' extended hand during his visit to Moscow two weeks ago, the new administration has signaled its readiness to put the relationship on a different footing if the Russian leadership is ready as well. President Medvedev, Prime Minister Putin, Foreign Minister Lavrov, and Deputy Prime Minister Ivanov, in turn, have all in various forms and at various times over the last several weeks indicated their guarded hopes for an improvement and specified areas where they think the two countries can make progress.

Redirecting the tenor and trajectory of relations, however, will not be easy. Over the last five years and with dramatic speed during and after the August 2008 Georgian war, relations have sunk to a point lower than any since before Mikhail Gorbachev's days as leader of the Soviet Union. In the most recent polling by the BBC World Service, 64 percent of Americans have a negative view of Russia, a jump of 28 percent over a year earlier; on the Russian side, 65 percent of respondents have a negative view of the United States, a 12 percent increase in the course of the last year.

More inauspicious, major voices in both countries harbor deep suspicions of the other side. It is not merely that, for the last half decade, Putin and those around him have been sharply critical of U.S. foreign policy, a country that in 2007 he said "has overstepped its national borders in every way," that is guilty of "unilateral and frequently illegitimate actions," that permits itself "an almost uncontained hyper use of force . . . plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts," and that "disdains the basic principles of international law." Even darker thoughts have come to characterize the outlook not only of many in the Russian policymaking community but also broad segments of the political elite who have persuaded themselves that powerful forces in the United States mean Russia harm. Whatever Washington may claim, efforts to extend NATO's benefits to Ukraine and Georgia, to put in place the European piece of the Global Missile Defense Program, to foster more open societies in the post-Soviet region, and to organize peacekeeping exercises with Russia's neighbors are at the end of the day

seen as animated by hostility to Russia and directed against its interests and even internal stability.

In the United States, Russia is commonly viewed as overweening and threatening to its neighbors, led by anti-democratic KGB-types, and driven by a desire to stick a monkey-wrench in the spokes of U.S. foreign policy whenever and wherever possible. Many in Congress, on the editorial pages, and within the policy community find it difficult to believe that Russian leaders genuinely see the new NATO or a small ballistic missile defense installation in Poland and the Czech Republic or democracy aid as threatening, and assume that Russian protestations are intended to mask their own aggressive intentions or to justify their heavy-handed policies and self-serving power structures at home.

No matter that much of the expert community in the United States and an admittedly smaller portion of the expert community in Russia dissents from these dueling perspectives. Even if the Obama administration sets a new course, Russian leaders answer in kind, and the mood softens, influential circles in both countries—within the Russian military and security forces as well as among nationalist politicians, and across a range of conservative skeptics in the United States—will remain unconvinced and wedded to the notion that the other side is not to be trusted. Risking much of anything in pursuit of U.S.-Russian cooperation, let alone a more ambitious partnership, will in these quarters be regarded as a foolish, even a dangerous, illusion.

However, realism about the current state of affairs and the inevitable enduring obstacles to change should not obscure the opportunity to build a different U.S.-Russian relationship or the reason for doing so. Start with the reason for seizing the opportunity, because this is where the problem originates. More precisely, for too long neither leadership has successfully conveyed to their publics the stakes each country has in the relationship, largely because, given their other preoccupations, they have not convinced themselves of how great the stakes are. These, however, are deep and broad—much deeper and broader than most here or there appreciate.

## The Stakes

Some are obvious. Because our two countries possess more than 90 percent of the world's existing nuclear weapons, keeping these safe and avoiding new and potentially destabilizing technological digressions form a common interest. Moreover, if any chance exists that a strategic nuclear arms control regime now in shreds can be reconstituted, strengthened, and adjusted to steady an unsteady multipolar nuclear world, it can only happen with joint U.S.-Russian leadership. Similarly, if nuclear weapons (as well as chemical and biological weapons) are to be kept from those we fear having them, if non-proliferation is to remain a feasible goal and the 2010 Review Conference to stem the collapse of the NPT regime, again, success depends on energetic U.S.-Russian cooperation. This is so, first, because we together hold the great bulk of the more than 2500 tons of the stockpiled fissile material (the makings for roughly 250,000 nuclear weapons); second, because prospects of internationalizing the nuclear fuel cycle, the key

to preventing the rush to nuclear energy from leeching into weapons-level enrichment activity, rests on the U.S. and Russian contribution; and, third, because the dream of a world without nuclear weapons can only advance if the United States and Russia—the two states that have most of them—lead the way.

Equally obvious, if Russia has 30 percent of the world's gas reserves, supplies 27 percent of the world's gas exports, including more than 30 percent of Europe's imports, and dominates the grid by which the vast oil and gas resources of the entire post-Soviet region reaches the outside world, then whether the United States and Russia battle or cooperate in developing this wealth and bringing it to market will do much to determine whether oil and gas add to or ease international tensions. Energy security, the new edgy mantra, takes on gravely more ominous tones if the United States and Russia are at odds.

Other stakes, however, are less obvious. Dealing with climate change, for example. Russia, after the United States and China, is the third largest emitter of green house gases. And given its energy inefficiency—three times greater than that of EU countries—it offers one of the most cost-effective areas of the world where energy-efficient technologies can make a difference, particularly if done by bringing to bear the innovations from trading partners, including the United States. More to the point, unless the United States, China, and Russia, perhaps in a three-way collaboration, act in harmony, the prospects for a successful UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December 2009 dim.

Or take the issue of the Arctic's vast resources now that global warming has opened the waterways to them, and Russia has rushed to stake its claim. Of the Arctic geological provinces studied by the U.S. Geological Survey, estimates are that they contain 13 percent of the world's undiscovered conventional hydrocarbons, including as much as 300 billion barrels of oil equivalents likely to be discovered in the next decade or so. Russia's aggressive assertion of its share of the seabed has already prompted Javier Solana and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, in a report to the EU, to warn of the risk to international stability and security if the race to harvest these riches turns competitive. Ensuring that it does not is a vital interest of both the United States and Russia.

Or consider Russia's importance when addressing major new threats to global welfare and security. As Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence week before last, the IP protocols for the vast portion of cyber attacks originate in Russia and China. Cooperation between our three governments, therefore, is *sine qua non* if the threat is to be contained. Equally important, from Russia and several of its neighbors effuses the scourge of trafficked humans, trade in endangered species, the flow of heroin to Europe, money laundering, and illegal arms sales. If the United States hopes to see lessened the pernicious effects of illicit trade on national as well as general global welfare, enlisting the Russian government in stronger and more effective efforts to thwart it holds the key to any success. This is, of course, linked to the devastating impact of corruption within Russia, Ukraine, and the other post-Soviet states. The new U.S. administration, to its credit,

appears to be contemplating proposing this as a priority area for U.S.-Russian cooperation—indeed, raising it to the presidential level.

Nor should the other positive gains from a happier relationship with Russia be ignored. Any society with as many talented and technologically skilled people as Russia, with the natural wealth of the country, located at the crossroads between Europe and Asia should be the next great increment to global economic growth. Indeed, on the eve of the current economic crisis, Russia was about to become Europe's largest consumer market. In the near term the economic crisis is likely to combine with the longer-term failure of Russia to achieve adequate structural reform to waylay the country's emergence in this role. But who would doubt that it is in the U.S. national interest to see this happen and where possible to help bring it about?

The most profound U.S. stake in the U.S.-Russian relationship, however, resides at a deeper, historically more consequential level. Were the two countries to step away from the impacted tangle they have made of the relationship and reflect on what logically should be over the long term their central common interest, it is peace, stability, and mutual security in an around the Eurasian landmass. The post-Soviet space is its core, and Russia the centerpiece of the post-Soviet space. For the United States this immense expanse is key to the critical arenas of its foreign policy: Europe, East Asia, and the troubled and dangerous southern front from Turkey to Pakistan. For Russia this expanse is its universe.

Promoting stable, progressive change within this region, preventing conflict areas from exploding into violence, and fostering mutually beneficial economic and political cooperation among the states of the region should serve as natural and compelling common ground. That, of course, has not been the story. Just the opposite. With ever increasing intensity over the last decade everything from energy to military assistance, from direct foreign investment to peacekeeping exercises has been turned into tools of competition rather than the building blocks of cooperation.

Lest it be thought that the alternative is hopelessly airy and out of touch with reality—that Russian nerves are too raw, that the natural tensions stirred by an active U.S. role in the region are too great—it is worth pondering the deeper lesson of the Georgian war. Sixteen years ago, when the original fighting in Abkhazia and South Ossetia stopped, Russian leaders entertained the notion that international efforts to deal with the conflicts dotting the post-Soviet landscape should be welcomed, and the Clinton administration drafted a presidential memorandum proposing a more active U.S. role in helping to resolve them. Russian receptivity faded within two years and the presidential memorandum stirred a storm of criticism back in the United States. Henceforth, everyone—Moscow, Washington, the OSCE, and the Friends of the UN Secretary General—allowed these so-called "frozen conflicts" to go unresolved. They did so, because it seemed safe to do so. Safe to do so, when weighed against the exertion and commitment required to force a settlement. Let those now in charge in Moscow and Washington ask themselves: "Is our national interest better served today by the

consequences of the Georgian war than it would have been had we together invested more strenuously in efforts to resolve the issue of the separatist territories then?"

At the risk of finishing this sketch at a seemingly remote philosophical level, one ultimate stake might be weighed. From the historian's perspective the most strikingly unique aspect of the post-Cold War international system is the absence of strategic rivalry among the major powers. Normally for nearly all of the last 300 years of modern international relations the central reality has been of one or more great powers defining one or more other great powers as the principal threat to its or their national security, focusing its or their military efforts on this or these countries, and mobilizing alignments to confront it or them. I call the absence "the blessing." Unless one takes the ahistorical view that we cannot get back to this point, that the "blessing" cannot be lost—because, as many would argue, an interconnected, interdependent world precludes it—one of the great but hidden challenges facing this U.S. president and the next will be to prevent the inevitable conflicts of interests among major powers from swelling into deep and enduring strategic rivalry. Already candidate cases exist: the United States and China, China and Japan, and, it must be added, the United States and Russia.

The Challenge

If the stakes are this high, then the standard required of U.S. policy should be equally high, even if, in a world with serious competing challenges, meeting it will be difficult. To a degree missing in the past policy needs to be comprehensive, coherent, and integrated across issue areas. Comprehensive means that it must address all of the key dimensions of the relationship, not merely those that command today's headlines—that it must do justice to the breadth and depth of the stakes that our country has in the relationship.

Coherent sets a still higher bar in two senses. First, attention to the issues in the relationship should not be spasmodic, depending on which issue stirs up more dust at any one time, or approached with one set of arguments, tradeoffs, and tactics on one day and another on another day. Second, coherence more than before comes by joining resources capable of giving policy a larger effect. Calibrating U.S. policy toward Russia with that of European allies promises to add greater constancy and balance to U.S. preoccupations and actions. Forging links between NATO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in fighting the insurgency in Afghanistan and helping to stabilize the larger region offers a way to increase the resonance of U.S. efforts and add staying power. Approaching problems that require tri- rather than bilateral cooperation among China, Russia, and the United States avoids disparate, suboptimal answers when dealing with climate change, regional security, UN reform, illicit trade, aspects of strategic nuclear arms control, and many other spheres.

It may be even harder, albeit no less essential, to recognize the interlocking character of nearly every issue in the relationship, and then to devise responses addressed to this complexity. Ensuring the security of oil and gas supplies out of the Caspian Sea region, for example, depends on managing the "frozen conflicts" and dealing with

regional instability in the south and north Caucasus. Increasing cooperation in areas of trade and investment requires progress in mitigating the impact of corruption in Russia and neighboring states, just as dealing with the problem of regional violence in the post-Soviet space requires progress in mitigating illicit trade in and from the region. Enhancing U.S.-Russian cooperation on Iran's potential nuclear weapons program requires enhancing U.S.-Russian cooperation on ballistic missile defense just as a meeting of the mind on ballistic missile defense will determine the prospects of offensive nuclear arms control.

Satisfying this standard, as said, represents a tall order, so something more is needed: a strategic vision. Where do we want the U.S.-Russian relationship to be in four to six years from now, and how do we get there? Not a rose-colored, impractical image, but a plausible, constructive set of aspirations to orient and discipline day-to-day policy. One step in fashioning this guidance might be a serious effort to imagine the actual nature and content of a strategic partnership, rather than the soft rhetorical filament casually lofted during earlier moments of optimism. It should not be beyond the ken of our two governments to work toward a genuinely collaborative framework promoting energy security for consumers and mutual benefit for energy producers, particularly if done in conjunction with the European Union. Nor should it seem out of reach to envisage a vigorous joint effort to craft a new and sturdier strategic nuclear arms regime, including the first steps toward the complex architecture required if the unregulated programs of the other six nuclear powers are to be rendered safer. Nor need it be unthinkable that the United States and Russia could not at some point regularly do more together to contain explosive regional conflicts, including those within the post-Soviet space. Defending against catastrophic terrorism already unites our agendas, but working to minimize areas where our definitions and assessments differ and to increase the effectiveness of our responses deserves to be part of a strategic partnership.

A strategic vision should also contemplate the kinds of cooperative behavior on the Russian part that we would most wish to see. Surely this includes earnest and effective measures, taken alone or alongside others, to steer not only North Korea and Iran, but the next generation of would-be nuclear powers from this choice. So presumably would it include a bias in favor of a cooperative, perhaps a joint, approach to the protection and exploitation of the global commons, including emerging challenges, such as sharing Arctic resources, solving water scarcity problems, and preserving space for safe commercial and scientific purposes. But the list is long and deserves to be thought of with some sense of priority. Seeing Russia invested in promoting progressive change within its neighborhood and receptive to similar U.S. efforts belongs toward the top of the list. Counting on the Russian government to create a domestic environment more conducive to foreign investment and looking for ways to make Russian foreign investment abroad transparent and attractive ought to have a place as well.

Finally, just as Russia has a right to wish for a U.S. foreign policy less given to unilateralism, less enamored of the military option, and more attuned to the security interests of others, the United States has a right to hope that sooner rather than later Russia will see it in its national interest to deal with neighbors by pursuing a strategy of

reassurance rather than one of coercion or, in the jargon of my profession, compellence. On the geostrategic front, so might the United States aim for a Russia committed to finding constructive ways of adjusting to the rise of new powers and of integrating them into an improved international order, rather than yielding to the temptation to manipulate cracks and tensions in the process to its own advantage.

A strategic vision, however, must be paired with realism about its chances. Not only the course of recent events and the mood they have engendered, but something close to structural obstacles stand in the way. On the U.S. side the scale and urgency of the problems its faces—from the national and global economic crisis to the parlous situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan—will drain energy and attention from Russia policy. Moreover, neither the policymaking community nor let alone the Congress is in the habit of framing the challenge in strategically ambitious terms, nor is the administration (yet) organized well to move in this direction.

On the Russian side the impediments are greater. They begin with the country's amorphous and institutionally ambiguous political landscape. Both the diarchy at the pinnacle of political power and the semi-authoritarian broader structure of authority are in motion. Predicting political trends in the country and even who or what ultimately will shape them invites only a fools' competition. And so too the twists and turns that will mark Russian foreign policy over the next 4-6 years. The economic crisis appears to be a major new intervening factor, but with unclear implications. Hypothetically it could accentuate the prospect of dramatically different outcomes: on the one hand, toward greater repression at home in the face of real or potential social unrest and a surly turn in foreign policy eager to use ginned-up enemies to distract from domestic failings; on the other hand, to a greater sense of urgency on the need for structural economic reform and a willingness to engage the public, while treading more softly in foreign policy and looking for points of accommodation with the outside world.

In fact, to this point, signs are that $30 a barrel oil, a stock market off 80 percent of its value seven months ago, projected null or negative growth rates for next year (when long-term plans count on steady annual growth of 7 percent), and possible unemployment at around 10 million have had a bracing effect. The swagger in foreign policy is less pronounced and the speeches, more tempered. At home, some close to President Medvedev, like Igor Jurgens, openly acknowledge that the social bargain of the last eight years—"the limiting of civil rights in exchange for economic well-being" (his words)—has been sundered, and a more respectful dialogue between the leadership and the public is required. Patience and sacrifice have become the new watchwords in political discourse, rather than boasts of becoming the world's fifth most important economy or turning Moscow into one of the world's new financial centers.

These chastened and potentially encouraging reactions, however, parallel other measures, such as an expansive new treason law and the swift clamping down on the slightest sign of protest, which suggest that another jittery and more intemperate reflex is also present. Moreover, were a crisis that Russian leaders currently view as manageable

to turn unmanageable and mutate into menacing forms of political instability, the present tells us nothing of how competent or forbearing future actions will be.

These imponderables both contribute to and combine with a second dimension of the problem. Russia's conflicted profile—the traumas and tensions of the historic transition through which it is passing, the emotional edge overlaying the conduct of foreign policy, and the gap between the status Russia desires in the outside world and the wherewithal it has by which to earn it–render its leadership less willing or able to make fundamental choices and develop a clear vision of the country's role and place. Its leaders have made plain what they oppose, but much less plain what they propose to substitute. Praise for multipolarity over unipolarity, exhortations to "democratize" international relations and "strengthen multilateralism," and even more precise urgings to develop a new "European security treaty" go unelaborated. At a more fundamental level, the Russian leadership is ill-disposed to wrestle with the question of whether and with whom to tie the country's fate—in some fashion with the West, or with the rising new powers, including China, or with none of the above and to settle for playing the field.

The Russia thus presented to the United States poses an obvious challenge, yet also an opportunity. Its orientation is more malleable, if prickly, than fixed and purposeful. Neither the United States nor any cluster of states can determine Russia's political course or dictate the evolution of its foreign policy. But how they chose to deal with it can influence both—for better or worse.

## The Response

Given the level of mistrust and disrepair in U.S.-Russian relations, any hope of improvement must first focus on concrete, practical steps by which the cycle can be broken. That will not be easy, as the Obama administration is already learning. No matter what new offerings are brought to Moscow, leaders with divided minds will be hesitant and those with their minds made up will look for traps and ulterior motives. Gradually, however, if the administration persists and the initiatives are seen as good faith, those who want to believe in the possibility of a more constructive U.S.-Russian relationship will exert themselves.

Symbolic steps are important in launching the process, and none would be more so than for the U.S. Congress to lift the Jackson-Vanik amendment. Its significance stems not from removing legislation that long ago lost its purpose or that seriously impairs economic cooperation between the two countries—it does not. Rather the positive symbolism is, first, in ending a stigma, and, second, in at last keeping a pledge to press for repeal made and broken too many times by prior administrations. This should be done soon and swiftly, without fanfare or horse-trading. Similarly, although more than a symbolic step and dependent on moves from Moscow's side, a decision by the administration to work harder to speed Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization will also serve this purpose.

Real progress, however, depends on the ability of the two sides to advance the substantive agenda, and the place to start is with the three issues the administration, judging from Undersecretary Burns' recent press interview in Moscow, appears to have singled out. The three, each important in itself, offer a chance to design a Russia policy meeting in part the tough standard discussed earlier: a policy that is coherent and integrated across issue areas—if not yet comprehensive.

The linked issue of Iran and ballistic missile defense constitutes the first of these. Framing the issue correctly is key. It should be, as the administration and others have suggested, approached as a logical linkage, not as an apples and oranges bargain. Not, as for example, "if you get serious about pressuring the Iranians, we will back off NATO membership action plans for Georgia and Ukraine." Rather, as the administration appears to be arguing, "if together we can discourage Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, the urgency of deploying a ballistic missile defense in Europe fades."

This, admittedly, does not guarantee success with the Russians, let alone the Iranians. That depends, at a minimum, on three other factors. First, whether the Russian leadership, which quite clearly does not want a nuclear Iran, can persuade itself that this goal outweighs risking harm to the many other stakes that it has in the Russian-Iranian relationship, such as access to Iranian oil and gas, dividing up Caspian Sea resources, selling arms, and managing the extremist Islamic threat in the northern Caucasus and Central Asia. The flip side of this dimension is a no-doubt-far-fetched Russian fear that a new U.S. approach to Iran, combined with a moderate outcome in the June Iranian elections, could lead to a U.S.-Iranian rapprochement that would then be used by one or the other against Russia.

Hence, the need for an additional dimension to U.S. policy—a conscious effort to convince Moscow that U.S.-Russian collaboration in containing Iran's nuclear aspirations will be followed by a mutual respect for one another's interests should Iran move toward normal relations with the West. But this too is not likely to be enough. To generate a serious readiness on Russia's part to toughen its diplomacy, the United States and the E-3 will need to settle on an arrangement likely to be more acceptable to Teheran than what is now on the table. (Perhaps, as Roger Cohen of the New York Times writes from Teheran,"Obama must abandon military threats to Iran's nuclear program in favor of an approach recognizing the country's inevitable mastery of the nuclear fuel cycle, while securing verifiable conditions that ensure such mastery is not diverted to bomb manufacturing.")

Post-START I and preparing the way for a future strategic nuclear arms control accord also come early. Both countries have every reason to move quickly to salvage the benefits of the expiring START I treaty, including, in particular, some version of its verification and monitoring provisions. Addressing the complex technical issues of counting rules, the status of downloaded warheads, and the new problem of conventional warheads on strategic delivery systems will require deft, innovative expert solutions. The more essential aspect of the problem, however, is no mystery. To succeed in achieving a follow-on START I agreement, the United States will have to shift from a posture that

either its preferences prevail or the agreement dies to one open to genuine compromises and tradeoffs. Burns' assurance in Moscow that the administration "is committed to negotiating a legally binding follow-on agreement," one of the contentious issues, suggests that Obama and his team are making the shift.

The administration has also begun weighing the virtues of proposing a further substantial reduction in nuclear warheads below the 1700-2200 level mandated by the SORT agreement. Here not only openness to Russian counterproposals will be required, but a readiness to confront basic choices. Moving to a level of 1000 warheads, as some now urge, including some within the administration, means that the role and nature of national missile defense must be addressed. Re-negotiating the missile defense issue entails a more fundamental reconciliation of the two sides' position on the relationship between offense and defense in strategic nuclear systems. Similarly, if the administration wishes to revitalize the effort to build a comprehensive regime regulating the nuclear arsenals of the two sides, as it should, this cannot be by U.S. fiat. The United States will have to be willing to seek common ground on questions such as the weaponization of space, the role of sub-strategic nuclear weapons in conventional war-fighting doctrine, and the deployment of U.S. strategic defense systems and nuclear weapons outside U.S. territory.

The mounting urgency in Afghanistan rounds out the immediate agenda. Afghanistan underscores the two-way street the Russia side must be willing to travel. The administration has every reason to expect Russian cooperation in aiding the U.S. and NATO effort in Afghanistan. Russian leaders know it is not in their national interest for the West to fail and subject Russia's southern front to the threat from either an Afghanistan again under the Taliban or one in explosive shambles. They, however, then must decide between doing what they can to ensure a successful outcome in Afghanistan or indulging their desire to marginalize and then expel a U.S. military presence from Central Asia. Whether Russian leaders pressured or purchased the Kyrgyz president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, into closing the Manas base captures but a part of the point. More importantly, Moscow did not discourage the Kyrgyz leader's decision—did not reverse the calculation and see it in Russia's national interest that the base should remain a secure link in the logistical chain supporting the war effort.

Thus, the United States is right to press the Russians to do more, including agreeing to allow military as well as non-military goods to transit their country. But so should it then encourage a larger role for Russia and its Shanghai Cooperation Organization partners in prosecuting the effort in Afghanistan, including a larger voice in deciding on appropriate political and military strategies. Nor would it hurt were policymakers in both countries to give a little more thought to what it is in the U.S.-Russian relationship that makes a U.S. military presence in Central Asia so neuralgic, and what needs to change for that to pass.

Focusing on these three issues is not to suggest that the two countries do not have many other things to discuss—from what next after the Georgian war to the upcoming G-20 summit, from what to do with the Conventional Forces in Europe treaty to the revival

of the 123 civil nuclear cooperation agreement. Iran, START I, and Afghanistan, however, are the most time-urgent matters, the ones that have both agitated the relationship and created opportunities for progress, and if they can be advanced they will form a foundation for a still more dramatic U.S. initiative.

If the administration hopes to free the relationship from the bickering that surrounds nearly every issue on the current agenda and reduce the poisonous suspicion with which the Russian side regularly greets U.S. initiatives, let alone make any progress toward realizing the strategic vision outlined above, it should strive from the start for a deep, far-reaching strategic dialogue with the Russian leadership. The reasons are several: first, without getting to the root of problems generating tensions in the relationship and impeding progress in key negotiations, the future will almost certainly resemble the recent past, and we will continue to have growing mistrust along with convulsive and emotional retreats at each point of new trouble. Second, by openly airing and then struggling with the deeper impulses shaping behavior, the two governments stand a chance of clearing away the ungrounded misapprehensions that often block sensible negotiating outcomes. Third, in committing itself to a serious discussion of the most basic issues in the relationship, the administration increases the likelihood that U.S. policy will then be more comprehensive, coherent, and well-integrated.

This is not an original idea. Previous administrations have attempted something approximating a strategic dialogue with their Russian counterparts. These experiments, however, were either short-lived or, as in the case of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, more focused on operational concerns than a deep plumbing of the assumptions and concerns underlying each side's position. Still, they offer lessons, and the first and central one is that to succeed, a strategic dialogue must be led by people close to the national leadership, people with the presidents' full confidence and authority; detached from the bureaucracies on both sides; and with no more than three or four principals on each side. Fleeting efforts in the past were undone either by the encroachment of bureaucracies seizing the exchange as their tool rather than allowing it to remain the flexible instrument of national leadership or by the failure of one or the other side to deliver participants with direct access to the national leadership.

Second, as the best of prior experience shows, in entering a strategic dialogue the two sides need to agree on paper to the principles that will guide it—including an understanding that no topic will be out of bounds. Third, it is critical that from the outset the two sides embrace, as before, a presidential "checklist process." The dialogue should generate concrete tasks and assign them to specific agencies, each with designated dates to report back on progress achieved. The list of tasks should be approved by the two presidents and then reviewed and renewed at each presidential meeting.

The heart of a strategic dialogue, however, resides in the agenda itself. As I have been arguing, the dimensions of the U.S.-Russian relationship are broad and profound, but four spheres dominate all others. They represent four of the 21st century's pre-eminent security concerns: European security, mutual security in and around the Eurasian landmass, nuclear security, and energy security. They also, not coincidentally, constitute the framing issues for the most friction-laden aspects of the relationship: namely, Ukraine and Georgia's NATO future, the role of ballistic missile defense in Europe, the U.S.-Russian interaction in the post-Soviet space, and the jockeying over oil and gas pipelines.

Each needs to be approached at a fundamental level. Thus, for example, when addressing the issue of European security the dialogue should start with each side's assessment of the core threats to European security. This should be the base on which to build an open-ended discussion of a potential architecture designed (a) to promote the mutual security of NATO members, Russia, and the states in between *as understood by all*; (b) to give content to President Medvedev's call for a new "European Security Treaty;" and (c) to develop a framework within which NATO and the security institutions in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) can work together to meet security challenges in Europe, the post-Soviet space, and beyond.

Dealing with the issue of mutual security in and around the Eurasian landmass will be the most difficult, but cannot be avoided if the strategic dialogue is to succeed. No issue cuts more deeply to the core of the current tension in the relationship. It must start from a frank and practical discussion of how each side sees its own and the other side's legitimate concerns, interests, and role in the post-Soviet space. That requires the two sides to address comprehensively the source of friction in all of its dimensions (NATO's activities, the "frozen conflicts," the use of Russian leverage with neighbors, the activities of Western NGOs, and competition over oil and gas). But so must a dialogue in this sphere explore ways by which the two countries can work together to mitigate the effects of the two most explosive issues: what each wants for Ukraine and is prepared to promote and how each conceives a path forward to a more stable, constructive Russian-Georgian relationship.

The topic of nuclear security consists of five linked challenges, each of them critical. At the base of the pyramid stands the issue of how the nuclear non-proliferation regime is best strengthened, including the immediate problem of diverting Iran and North Korea from further destroying it. Next and intimately linked to the first challenge comes the need to manage the so-called "nuclear renaissance," that is, the likely rapid growth of states developing domestic nuclear power with potentially full fuel cycle capabilities and the attendant risk of proliferation. Devising proliferation-proof reactors, internationalizing fuel cycle services, and, in that connection, putting in place U.S.-Russian cooperation under the 123 agreement become key.

Third and closely tied to the first two concerns is the question of whether and how to move to a nuclear-weapons-free world. Deep concern over where nuclear proliferation may next lead is what drives prominent U.S. voices and an increasing number of western governments to take the proposal seriously. One then crosses the threshold to the fourth issue: regulating the nuclear arsenals of the "haves," first and foremost the United States and Russia. While this task too links to the issue of non-proliferation, because it entails the nuclear powers' Article VI commitments under the NPT to limit nuclear weapons and eventually to achieve their elimination, its significance extends far beyond. The United States and Russia are no longer "two scorpions in a bottle," but the waste and dangers of their unregulated nuclear choices are in neither country's interest. Nor is a failing U.S.-Russian strategic arms regime conducive to movement on the fifth piece in the pyramid, the need to begin managing the risks in a multipolar nuclear world, particularly the distinctly de-stabilizing features of the Indian, Pakistani, and Chinese nuclear postures.

Finally, energy security. The United States and Russia, of course, have long toyed with an energy dialogue, and launched one in 2002, only to see it languish until

partially revived in the last year of the Bush administration. Useful as the discussion of potential projects and practical measures may be, however, the two sides need to push the dialogue to a deeper level. Discussing ways to bring Russian oil and LNG to the North American market or how to enhance cooperation within the consortia developing Caspian Sea oil, while at the same time the two countries maneuver against competing pipeline projects, begs the core question: is cooperation or competition the salient feature of one or both countries' strategy?

Similarly wringing one's hands over European gas dependency and straining to find ways of breaking it without confronting the issue directly in conversations with Russian leaders would seem to be a wasted opportunity. Many aspects of the enormously complex nexus of issues surrounding the politics of oil and gas from Russia and the Caspian Sea Basin only make sense as part of a three-way dialogue among Russia, the United States and the Europeans. But this does not mean that a serious well-conceived U.S.-Russian dialogue should neglect or short-change the subject, or shun the chance, for example, to find out precisely what Prime Minister Putin meant when at Davos he urged states "to work out a new international legal framework for energy security." One, "if implemented" that "could have the same economic impact as the treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community," one "able to unite consumers and producers in a common energy partnership that would be real and based on clear-cut international rules."

To outline the agenda of an ambitious strategic dialogue is not to assume that from it agreement will come easy or, in some important respects, even at all. There are issues where national interests will clash even when emotion and misreading are stripped away. There are also issues subject to the warping effect of politics at home that will not submit to the most well-intentioned dialogue. At root, the purpose of a strategic dialogue is to take what was impossible going in and shrink it; to take what was barely possible before and enlarge it.

Finally, nothing in the agenda or approach advocated here prejudices, much less precludes a strong and independent U.S. policy toward Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and the other states of the region. It is in the U.S. national interest—not least because it is in the interest of global stability—to see as many of these states as possible emerge from this period of history as peaceful, stable, prospering, self-confident democratic societies. But it is also in the United States' long-term interest to avoid promoting this goal in ways that intentionally or unintentionally encourage these states to balance against Russia or that automatically treat Russian-sponsored institutions in the post-Soviet space as suspect, rather than, with workable adjustments, as a potential complement to parallel structures in the West.

Nor is there any suggestion here that the sensitive and often roiling subject of clashing political values and U.S. concerns over political trends within Russia should be soft-peddled or ignored. These issues need to be a part of the relationship. Not because the United States has any right to sit in judgment of the Russian side or any basis on which to instruct the Russians and their leaders; but because any durable and deeper partnership between our two countries will depend on a minimally kindred sense of what our societies are about. The two sides, however, must find a way to discuss these matters in a civil, constructive manner; not by putting Russia in the pillory, but by identifying

areas where we both face challenges and have come up short—say, the problem of illegal immigration or the tension between the struggle against terrorism and the protection of civil rights. First prove that we can have a productive conversation, then figure out how to move on to subjects where the distance separating us is greater.

One final suggestion: it has been almost 16 years to the day since President Clinton on the eve of his first summit with Boris Yeltsin gave the last major presidential address on U.S. Russia policy. The time is right for President Obama to share with his administration, the American public, and an intently interested Russian audience his strategic vision for U.S.-Russian relations, his image of where he would like these to be several years from now, and then to invite the Russian side to join in a frank, wide-ranging discussion of how we might get there. The importance of the relationship merits it, and the less-than-ideal current state of affairs more than justifies it.